

**AVANT GAME:**  
flexible structures / site-specific play

**JANE M<sup>C</sup>GONIGAL**

Department of Performance Studies / Center for New Media  
University of California at Berkeley, USA



**AVANT GAME:**  
flexible structures / site-specific play

***SUPERHEROES!***

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flexible structure / site-specific play

# **SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES!**

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## **SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES**

- Who are the site-specific superheroes, and what are their superpowers?



## ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

- Who are the site-specific superheroes, and what are their superpowers?
- Where do they get their superpowers?



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## ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

- Who are the site-specific superheroes, and what are their superpowers?
- Where do they get their superpowers?
- Are they using them for good or for evil?



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# ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

- Who are the site-specific superheroes, and what are their superpowers?
- Where do they get their superpowers?
- Are they using them for good or for evil?
- And what is the structure of a Superhero Society?



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# ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

HINT: Transformation and Play?...



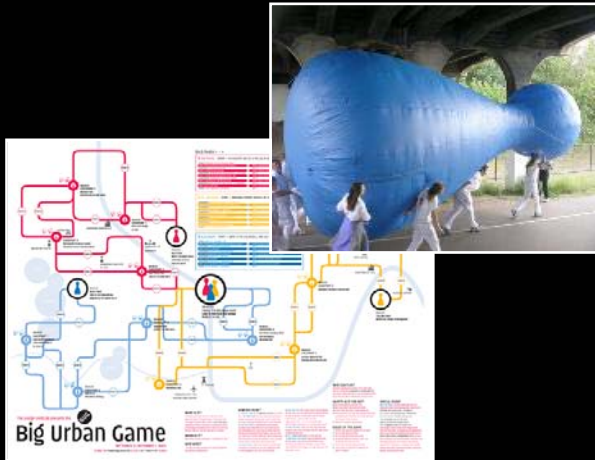
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# **SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES**

HINT: Network-enabled play in public places



Pervasive Play:  
**The Big Urban Game** (2003) by the  
Design Institute

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# **SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES**

HINT: Network-enabled play in public places



Urban superhero  
gaming:

**The Go Game**  
(2001 - present) by  
Wink Back, Inc.

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# **SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES**

HINT: Network-enabled play in public places



Smart mobs:

Flash mobbing San Francisco, New York & London (2003)

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# **SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES**

HINT: Network-enabled play in public places



South Australian Geocachers



The sport where YOU are the search engine

Internet Guided Offline Recreation: Geocaching (2003)

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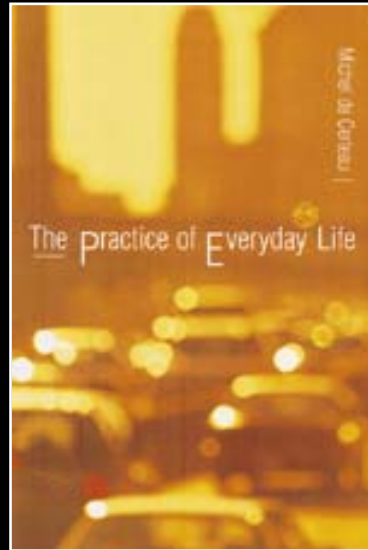
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## DE CERTEAU'S HEROES

Michel de Certeau dedicates  
*The Practice of Everyday Life* to  
(20<sup>th</sup> century) heroes:

“To a **common hero**, a  
ubiquitous character walking in  
countless thousands on the  
streets. ...”



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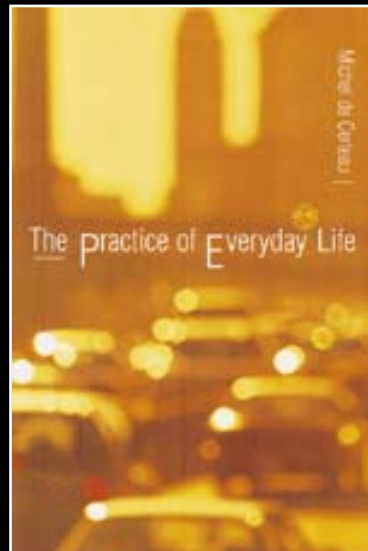
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## DE CERTEAU'S HEROES

Michel de Certeau dedicates  
*The Practice of Everyday Life* to  
(20<sup>th</sup> century) heroes:

“A multitude of quantified  
heroes who become the  
ciphered river of the streets, a  
mobile language of  
computations and rationalities  
that belong to no one.”



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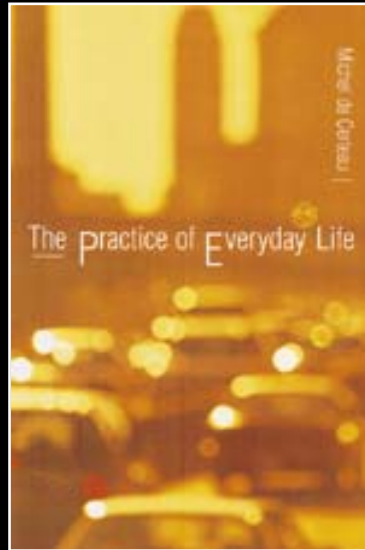
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## **DE CERTEAU'S HEROES**

the *bricoleurs* and *flaneurs*:

- operate in everyday life
- are particularly visible on the urban landscape
- appropriate normative, built environments for personal ends
- create layers of stories and memories by traversing spaces



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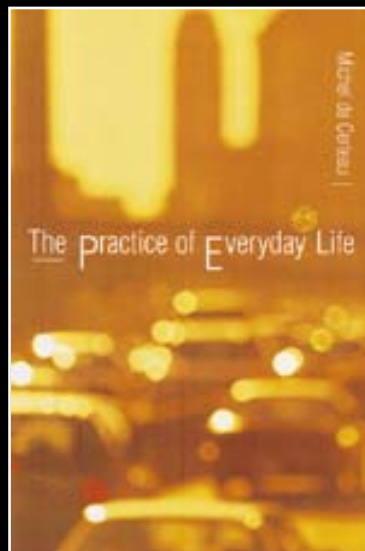
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## **DE CERTEAU'S HEROES**

interesting from a *play & games perspective*:

- “a challenging mobility that does not respect places is alternately playful and threatening...”



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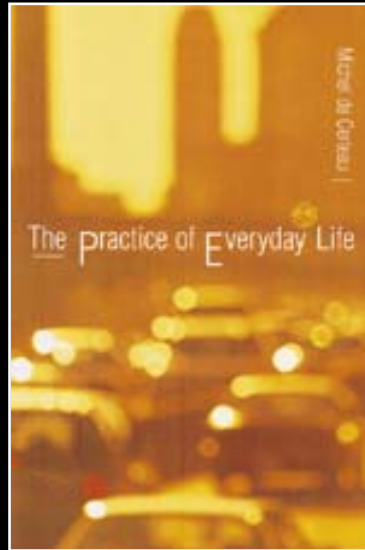
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## **DE CERTEAU'S HEROES**

interesting from a *play & games perspective*:

- “It makes room for a void. In that way, it opens up clearings; it ‘allows’ a certain play within a system of defined places. It authorizes the production of an area of free play.”



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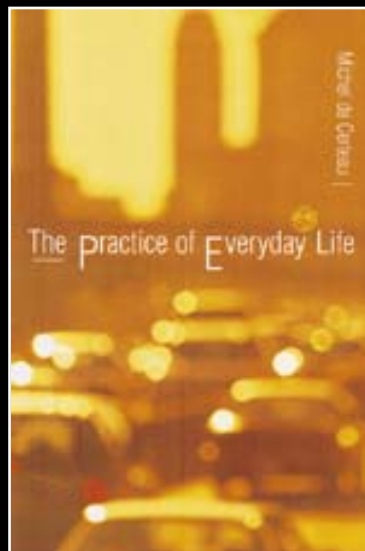
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## **DE CERTEAU'S HEROES**

interesting from a *network perspective*:

- heroes are highly “mobile” and constitute a “network”
- create a “massive” and “pervasive” marginality
- conduct an “exercise in ubiquity”



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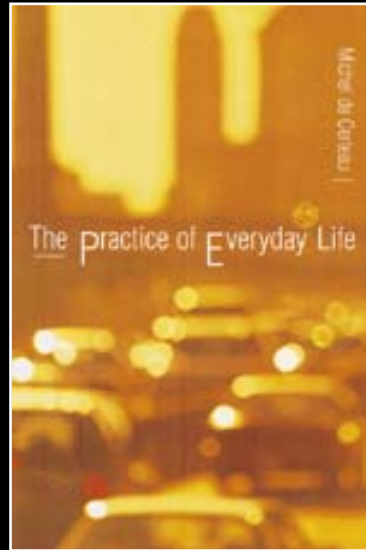
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## DE CERTEAU'S HEROES

interesting from a *network perspective*:

- mobile network technologies?
- pervasive play and ubiquitous computing?
- massively participatory events and interactions?



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## HEROES TO SUPERHEROES

**super-**  
*pref.*

- Above; over; upon: *superimpose*.
- Superior in size, quality, number, or degree: *superfine*.
- Exceeding a norm: *supersaturate*.
- Excessive in degree or intensity: *supersubtle*.

*(www.dictionary.com)*

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# **HEROES TO SUPERHEROES**

In theory: (*de Certeau* → *me*)

Linguistic → Ludic

Power comes from seeing all → Power comes from being seen by all

Space through stories → Space through spectacle

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# **HEROES TO SUPERHEROES**

In practice: (*hero culture* → *superhero culture*)

Conspiracy theories → conspiracies

Top secret intelligence → collective intelligence

Massive strength → massive parallelism

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## ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

Who are the site-specific superheroes?



They are people who answer ringing payphones...

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They are people who answer ringing payphones...

- alert and responsive to opportunities for (inter)action in their everyday environments

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## ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

Who are the site-specific superheroes?



They are people who answer ringing payphones...

- alert and responsive to opportunities for (inter)action in their everyday environments
- favor location-specific, rather than mobile, engagement

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## ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

Who are the site-specific superheroes?



... and then massively mobilize the data across space and time.



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# ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

Who are the site-specific superheroes?



... and then massively mobilize the data across space and time.

- leave physical traces
- make cell phone calls
- send text messages
- blog
- upload files



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... and what are their superpowers?



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# ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

... and what are their superpowers?

- See through pre-determined structures



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# ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

... and what are their superpowers?

- See through pre-determined structures
- Spontaneously generate more playful structures



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## ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

... and what are their superpowers?

- See through pre-determined structures
- Spontaneously generate more playful structures
- Make the new structures clear and visible to others



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## ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

... and what are their superpowers?

- See through pre-determined structures
- Spontaneously generate more playful structures
- Make the new structures clear and visible to others
- Create space for meaningful engagement with and within a physical environment



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# ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

Where do they get their superpowers?

From the network.

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Where do they get their superpowers?

From the network.

(how *The Matrix*)

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Where do they get their superpowers?

From the network.

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(but not really.)

- The power of social imagining

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# ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

Where do they get their superpowers?

From the network.

(how *The Matrix*)

(but not really.)

- The power of social imagining
- Consensual reality, not consensual hallucination

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Are they using their superpowers for good or for evil?

We need more data.

---

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# ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

Are they using their superpowers for good or for evil?

We need more data.

- The Go Game
- Geocaching
- Flash Mob Supercomputing

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## ***BEFORE THE GO GAME***



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## **AFTER THE GO GAME**



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## **GEOCACHING SUPERHERO**



Berkeley Geocacher 2003

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## ***FLASH MOB SUPERCOMPUTING***



University of San Francisco 04.03.04

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What is the structure of a Superhero Society?

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What is the structure of a Superhero Society?

“Avant game”  
*before the game*

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What is the structure of a Superhero Society?

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The benefits of gaming:

(Clear objectives, methods for action and feedback)

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## ***SITE-SPECIFIC SUPERHEROES***

What is the structure of a Superhero Society?

“Avant game”  
*before the game*

The benefits of gaming:

(Clear objectives, methods for action and feedback)

With the flexibility of play:

(Subversive, spontaneous, collective)

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## ***WANTED: PARTNERS IN CRIME***



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*Thank you to Zabet Patterson, Meredith Hoy and Greg Niemeyer for the opportunity to be a part of 040404.*